

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3320
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 3136

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MPOL, KS
SUBJECT: PAK PRAISES ROK DEFENSE INDUSTRY

1. KOREAN PRESS APRIL 16 FEATURED OPTIMISTIC STATEMENTS ON ROK DEFENSE INDUSTRY MADE BY PRESIDENT PAK AT PRESS CONFERENCE AFTER TOUR OF PRODUCTION FACILITIES IN KYONGSANG PROVINCES. PAK REPORTEDLY SAID HE HAD ORDERED DEVELOPMENT OF DEFENSE INDUSTRY IN 1968, AFTER BLUE HOUSE RAID, AND ACTUAL WORK ONLY BEGAN IN EARLY 1970S, IN CONTRAST WITH NORTH KOREA WHICH BEGAN IN 1960. HE GAVE 1978 AS TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION OF "BASIC PROJECTS" AND PREDICTED THAT "IN NEXT FEW YEARS" ROK WOULD BE ABLE TO PRODUCE ALL TYPES OF WEAPONS EXCEPT FIGHTER PLANES. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT NORTH KOREA LIKELY TO ACCELERATE ITS OWN PROGRAMS IN RESPONSE BUT ARGUED THAT NK ECONOMY WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY SUPPORTING SUCH AN EFFORT. HE STATED THAT ROK AT PRESENT COULD "OVERWHELM NORTH KOREA IN A CONFRONTATION."

2. PAK REJECTED AS UNNECESSARY ANY FURTHER VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS BY INDUSTRY FOR DEFENSE, ON GROUNDS THAT PEOPLE WERE PAYING THE DEFENSE SURTAX. HE SUGGESTED, HOWEVER, THAT INDUSTRIES COULD APPROPRIATELY PROVIDE THEIR OWN ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENSE WEAPONS. CHUNGANG ILBO ALSO QUOTES

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PAK AS SAYING THAT "I HAVE NOT YET SHOWN THE NATION'S DEFENSE INDUSTRIAL FACILITIES TO AMERICANS, THOUGH THEY WANTED TO SEE THEM. BUT I THINK NOW I WILL DO SO GRADUALLY."

3. COMMENT: (C) KOREAN PUBLIC HAS HITHERTO BEEN SURPRISINGLY UNAWARE OF EXTENT OF ROK DEFENSE INDUSTRY AND EFFORT TO MAKE ITS EXISTENCE KNOWN IS PROBABLY OVERDUE.

PAK'S HYPERBOLE IN ITS BEHALF APPEARS CLEARLY DESIGNED FOR PUBLIC CONSUMPTION. HOWEVER HE MAY BE UNAWARE OF SOME OF THE PROBLEMS THE DEFENSE INDUSTRY FACES AND HIS OPTIMISM WILL PROBABLY BE VIEWED WITH SOME SKEPTICISM AMONG THE MORE PESSIMISTIC OF HIS OFFICIALS. REFERENCE TO AMERICANS' BEING KEPT AWAY FROM FACILITIES IS DIFFICULT TO FATHOM; SO FAR AS WE ARE AWARE THERE ARE NO WEAPONS PLANTS THAT U.S. PERSONNEL HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO VISIT AND WE EXPECT TO CONTINUE TOURING THEM ON REGULAR BASIS.

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